

In the days of Noah, humanity had become utterly corrupt.
God decided to wipe out the human race.
Only one righteous man (and his family) was left alive.

At least, that’s the way we usually say it.

But that’s not quite how Genesis says it.

Genesis says that *the earth was corrupt in God’s sight...
for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.*
And God said to Noah,
*‘I have determined to make an end of all flesh,
for the earth is filled with violence through them.’*

Our summary focuses on *man*.

Genesis focuses on *the earth*, and “*all flesh in which is the breath of life.*”

Why is this important?

Because you need to understand that people are not isolated.

We are not isolated from *each other* – we are connected as the human race.

We are not isolated from *creation* – remember that God said,

“Cursed is the *ground* because of you!”

All of creation labors under the curse – *because of man*.

God created man in his image –

and he gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth.

And that meant that if Adam and Eve failed in their rule,

then all the earth would be plunged into disorder and dismay because of them.

Last week we looked at the question “what is sin?”

What is the *problem* for which Christ came and died.

Joel showed us that there are both sins of commission –

we do things that we shouldn’t do,

and there are sins of omission –

we fail to do the things we should do!

Today we are looking a little more particularly at the *root* of the problem.

Where does sin come from?

And how did *we* get stuck with it?

Questions 16-19 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism fit together rather neatly.
They are all dealing with the basic question of
“why am I condemned in Adam?”

Q. 16. Did all mankind fall in Adam’s first transgression?

A. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

Now, it would be really easy to object to this.

After all, Adam and Eve were the ones who sinned –
how come I have to suffer for what they did?!
It’s not my fault!

And we’ll come back to that question, and see how Paul answers it in Romans 5 –
but first, I want to walk through questions 17-19,
so that you can see the big picture.

Q. 17. Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

We don’t often use the word “estate” in this way anymore.

Some have even suggested that we translate this into a more modern idiom:
“the fall brought mankind into a *condition* of sin and misery.”
Now it’s true that the fall brought us into a condition of sin and misery.
Sin and misery are in fact the condition into which we are born.

But there’s one reason why I can’t go there.

What do you think of when you think of someone’s “estate”?
Sure, you might think of a “stately mansion” and a white fence...
but what’s the one place where we still use the word “estate”?
It’s used to speak of inheritance.

You see, the *estate* of sin and misery is more than a “condition.”
It is an inheritance.
Or, to put it more accurately, it is a condition that we inherit!

If you think of the two meanings of “estate” woven together –
it *is* a place to live – and it is inherited from Adam and Eve.

We *live* in an estate of sin and misery – that is our inherited condition that we receive from Adam

Questions 18-19 flesh out a bit of what the estate of sin and misery is all about.

1. An Estate of Sin and Misery (Genesis 6)

a. What Does It Mean to Be Sinful? (Genesis 6:1-5)

Q. 18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

It's important to distinguish between "original sin" and "the first sin."

The first sin of the human race (as we saw last time)
was when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit.

But *original sin* refers to the "original sinfulness" of the human race that *becomes ours* insofar as we are "in Adam."

And the catechism describes this original sin as having three parts:

1) the guilt of Adam's first sin

You see that in Romans 5:16 – "the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation" for all.

It's not just that we *die* because of Adam's first sin.
We are also *condemned* because of Adam's first sin.
We are accounted *guilty* because of Adam's first sin.

2) the want (or lack) of original righteousness

Some people think that children are born innocent,
and that they have to learn how to sin.

I don't know about your kids,
but mine were all born sinners.

They lacked original righteousness!

As Paul says in Romans 5:19 – "by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners"

3) the corruption of his whole nature

which refers to how corruption has affected us body and soul;
we sometimes call this "total depravity" –

not because people are as bad as they could possibly be,
but because there is no part of us that has escaped the corruption of sin.

You see this vividly in Genesis 6:5.

"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,
and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

This is how corrupt humanity has become.

Now, some have argued that Genesis 6:5 is speaking of the *wicked* before the Flood.
They were all wiped out by the Flood.

And the only remaining members of the human race were Noah and his family –
and Noah, as verse 9 says, “was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.”
Therefore some say that Genesis 6:5 does not apply to a situation after the Flood.

But keep reading.

In Genesis 8:21, *after the Flood*, when righteous Noah and his family
are the only humans on the earth,
God says,
“I will never again curse the ground because of man,
for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

In other words, God says that *even righteous Noah* and his family
are corrupted by the same stain of original sin:
the guilt of Adam’s first sin,
the want of original righteousness,
and the corruption of his whole nature.

So, what does it mean to be sinful?
It means that we share Adam’s guilt.
It means that we lack original righteousness.
It means that we are corrupt in every part.

The intentions of man’s heart is evil from his youth.
And, from this corrupt fountain pours forth all sorts of “actual transgressions.”
So if we live in an estate of sin and misery –
we now know something of the sinfulness of that estate – that inherited condition.

But what does it mean to be miserable?

b. What Does It Mean to Be Miserable? (Genesis 6:6-8)

Q. 19. What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

The misery of our inherited condition is also three-fold.

1) We have lost communion with God.

There is no greater misery.

You all know how much you enjoy the closeness and fellowship of friends and family.
When things are going well with your relationships,
there is no greater joy!

Well, in the same way, there is no greater misery than alienation from friends and family.

If we are created in the image of God – created as his sons and daughters –

then alienation from *God* is the greatest misery imaginable;
and restored communion with God is the greatest joy possible!

But with the loss of this communion,

2) we have also come under his wrath and curse.

Think of how this is portrayed in Genesis 6.

The sons of God (the godly line of Seth)

abandon fellowship with God for the company of the daughters of Cain,
and thus fall under God's wrath and curse.

3) and so are made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself,
and to the pains of hell forever.

The Flood was designed as a picture of this.

God destroyed the world by water as a picture of what sin deserves –
and as a demonstration of what he will do in the end,
when he brings the judgment of fire upon the earth.

As I've often pointed out in various passages,

God's basic principle is start with water –
If that doesn't work, then use fire!

2. What Is Original Sin? (Romans 5:12-21)

Q. 16. Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

A. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

So let's get back to that question, "how can God declare me guilty for Adam's sin?"

How can it be fair for God to condemn *me* for what *Adam* did?

He sinned – and because he sinned, I get a life of misery and corruption.
How is that fair??!!

If you think in terms of modern individualism,
it's not fair.

If everyone should be judged strictly and solely based on their own merits,
then God is not fair.

But did you hear how I put that?

If you take *our standards*, and judge God according to our standards,
then God is not fair.

But God does not judge according to our standards.
And for that I say, "Thanks be to God!"

Why do I say that?

Because if it would be unfair for God to find you guilty in Adam,
then it would also be unfair for God to justify you in Christ!
If you are not corrupted by Adam's sin,
then neither are you healed by Christ's righteousness.

Or, as Ambrose of Milan put it more than 1600 years ago:

“In Adam I fell,
in Adam I was cast out of Paradise,
In Adam I died.

How shall God call me back except he find me in Adam?

For just as in Adam I am guilty of sin and owe a debt to death,
so in Christ I am justified.” (Ambrose)

This is what Paul is getting at in Romans 5 (read Romans 5:12-21).

1. The Reign of Death through the Sin of Adam (5:12-14)

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man,
and death through sin,
and so death spread to all men because all sinned—
for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given,
but sin is not counted where there is no law.
Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses,
even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam,
who was a type of the one who was to come.*

You could summarize Paul's basic point by saying:

The universal reign of death demonstrates that all sinned in Adam.

The way you know that sin was universal is because of death.

The wages of sin is death (as Paul says in Romans 6).

If people are dying, then you *know* that they are guilty before God.

That's why Paul says in verse 14, that death reigned from Adam to Moses,

“even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam.”

Adam's transgression was a willful violation of God's law.

And so Adam died.

But from Adam to Moses there was no “law” –

no written revelation from God

that laid down what man was to believe concerning God

and what duty God required of man.

And yet Paul says “sin was in the world before the law was given.”

How do we know?

Because people died.

If people are dying, then you know that sin is in the world!

Now you may ask,

what about a tiny newborn child, who has never had the chance to sin?

How can God say that this infant is guilty?

A child cannot stand before God and protest his innocence,

because in Adam he sinned,

in Adam he died.

Even those who do not violate a specific commandment

(their sin is not like the transgression of Adam),

yet still they sinned in Adam, they are guilty in Adam, and so they die in Adam.

All of Adam's race suffers under that curse.

And you have not escaped!

You have faced disease and death in your families;

You have felt the bitter sting of miscarriages,

divorce, or abusive parents or spouses.

You children have lain sick in your beds,

coughing and sneezing--crying for relief.

Is it any wonder that our catechism says

that the sin of Adam brought us into an estate of sin and misery?

God is angry with Adam and all of his children.

2. Much More – the Gift Is Better than the Trespass (5:15-17)

But the free gift is not like the trespass. [verse 15]

There is a parallel between Adam and Christ – Adam *was* a “type of the one who was to come.”

But the parallel goes in opposite directions!

In other words, Adam and Christ are similar

ONLY in that they both represent those who are “in” them.

In Adam, I die.

In Christ, I am made alive.

Notice the “much more” verse 15:

But the free gift is not like the trespass.

For if many died through one man's trespass,

much more have the grace of God

and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ

abounded for many.

And Paul says again in verse 16:

*And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin.
For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation,
but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.*

And in verse 17 Paul returns to the central theme of the passage –
the theme of the reign of death and the reign of grace.

*If because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man,
much more will those who receive the abundance of grace
and the free gift of righteousness
reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

Notice how Paul puts this:

through the one man's trespass, death reigned.

But through the one man Jesus Christ, *we* reign in life.

Do you see that in verse 17?

You might think that the parallel would be:

Through one man's trespass, death reigned,
And so through one man's righteousness, life reigned.

But Paul is not saying that Adam and Christ are equals.
No, they are opposites!

Think back to the Garden.

Who was supposed to reign on earth?

Adam and Eve.

They were called to fill the earth and subdue it.

They were called to have dominion (lordship) over the creatures,
and to rule over creation as God's vicegerent.

But through Adam's sin, death reigned in his place.

And so our Lord Jesus Christ has overthrown the power of death,
through his resurrection from the dead.

And now it is not "life" that reigns,
but Jesus Christ, the second Adam who reigns.

*Therefore, those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness
will **reign in life** through the one man Jesus Christ.*

And this is where Paul zeros in on our question:

How can a just God declare you guilty for Adam's sin?

3. How Can a Just God Declare You Righteous for One Man's Obedience? (5:18-19)

If God cannot declare you guilty in Adam,

then God cannot declare you righteous in Jesus Christ, who is the 2d Adam
This is the contrast which Paul draws in Romans 5.

Adam is not just anybody,
he is the head of the whole of humanity.
The actions of the head--the "one man"--
have a profound impact on everyone who is in that one man.
So, Adam's sin is not simply his own.

As Paul puts it in verse 18 (and Paul has no verbs in verse 18, so I'll read it without them):
*Therefore, as one trespass unto condemnation for all men,
so one act of righteousness unto justification for all men;*

Adam's ONE sin constituted all men sinners.
So also Christ's one act of righteousness constituted justification for all men.

As Paul goes on to say in verse 19:
*for as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners,
so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

In short, there are only two men in all of history--Adam and Christ.
If you are in Adam, then you receive condemnation and death through his sin.
If you are in Christ, then you receive justification and life through his righteousness.

To put it simply, if you think that it is unjust for God to declare you guilty in Adam,
then you should also think it unjust for God to declare you righteous in Christ!

4. The Reign of Grace unto Life (5:20-21)

God created Adam to reign in life.
But Adam sinned and handed his kingdom over to Death.
God then re-established his kingdom through giving his law to Moses.

*Now the law came in to increase the trespass,
but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,
so that, as sin reigned in death,
grace also might reign through righteousness
leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

We don't have time to explore all that Paul is doing here.
I will simply say that grammar is important.
Verb tenses are important.

Have you noticed the verb tenses of the word "to reign"?
verse 14 "death reigned"
verse 17 "death reigned"

verse 17 “those who receive the abundance of grace will reign”
verse 21 “sin reigned”
verse 21 “so that grace might reign”

All I will say now is that Paul’s point is that the reign of sin and death is over.
Sin and death *reigned* –
 but they no longer reign!
Those who are in Christ *will* reign,
 but we do not *yet* reign.
What is it that reigns now?

Grace.

Through the one act of righteousness – the death and resurrection of Jesus –
the free gift of righteousness has come to those who believe in Jesus,
so that as sin reigned in death,
 grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Conclusion:

When you go to work tomorrow, why should you be thinking about how we all sinned in Adam?
 why should you be thinking about the reign of death and the reign of grace?

One reason:

- 1) If you are in Christ, then the reign of sin and death is ended.
 That’s where Paul goes in Romans 6.
 If you have been united to Christ,
 and if you have died with him,
 then you **are not** under the power of sin and death.
 Sin is not your master--so do not let it master you.
 Death has no more authority over you,
 than it does over Christ himself.
 Do you believe that?

If you do, then how you speak and how you act
 will be shaped by the dominion – by the reign of grace.

If you understand that you have died with Christ,
 then you need to put to death all that belonged to your Adamic nature.
 This is where Paul goes in Romans 8

But where do you start?

Let me put it this way,
 if you are standing in front of a dam with a hundred little holes in it,
 is it going to do any good to simply stick your finger in one of them?
That would be like putting a band-aid on a severed artery.
 It won't work.

Sin is like that reservoir:

it may only show itself in these little trickles on the surface of the dam,
but there is enough water back there to destroy the whole dam.

Even so,

sin may only show itself in little trickles on the surface of your life,
but there is a mass of sin within you,
large enough to destroy your whole life.

You can try to deal with one sin at a time,
but another one will always take its place.

You can eliminate one sinful habit,
but there are three more which were hiding behind it!

But I do not counsel despair.

Rather, I want you to see how big your God is.

You've been thinking too small.

God is not in the business of repairing dams,
he is drying up the whole reservoir of sin and misery!
And in Jesus Christ that is exactly what he has done.

Jesus did not content himself with dealing with the little trickles
which come through the dam –

Jesus died to dry up the reservoir!

And he is the fountain of living water that now pours forth his grace into you.

You are no longer defined by Adam's one act of sin,
Rather, you are defined by Christ's one act of righteousness--
his death and resurrection.

Let us pray.